

“It’s Not Great News”: A summary of the governor’s October 14 press conference



Governor Gina Raimondo and DOH director Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott gave the weekly COVID press briefing today at 1pm.

First, the data since yesterday. Rhode Island saw 160 new COVID cases since yesterday. One hundred thirty-one people are in the hospital, 13 of those people are in the ICU, and four are on ventilators. DOH reports eight additional fatalities today, bringing the total number of COVID-related deaths to 1,147.

“It’s not great news,” the governor announced today. Rhode Island has seen gradual increases in a number of key metrics the state uses to assess transmission of the coronavirus. The percent positive rate is 2.7% for yesterday, the highest it’s been since August. Hospitalizations have doubled in the last four weeks. The hospital system still has plenty of capacity, but local healthcare system administrators are starting to get worried. As a result, the governor will be announcing more restrictions at a press conference tomorrow at 1pm. There will be no major changes to K-12 schools, retail or restaurants.

“Bottom line is this: Let this be a wakeup call for Rhode Island,” said Raimondo. She referred to the

example in Wisconsin. The governor explained that data patterns in RI and the rest of New England are looking similar to other states before those states saw big surges. "There was nothing to worry about until there was," she said. Wisconsin, an example the governor detailed at length, saw small but consistent upticks in percent positive testing rates and hospitalizations.

The current upticks are not from large gatherings according to the governor. Upticks in spring and summer were driven by large gatherings. The governor today said the current upticks were from small gatherings. People who might not follow the rules with friends or close family, not distancing, handwashing, observing mask guidance, etc.

Congregate settings, while still seeing deaths (deaths from COVID are still tied to age and underlying conditions), are seeing fewer cases; colleges and universities are seeing fewer cases; K-12 schools are still seeing fewer cases. "It's not like letting kids work [on school] from home is the answer because [case numbers] it's 50/50," said the governor. According to contact tracing, the uptick in cases is coming from outside these areas, small gatherings of people bending the rules.

"Anytime you're out of your house with people, wear a mask and keep your distance," said Raimondo. According to the governor, it doesn't matter if you're visiting family or friends the next town over, you still need to be following the guidelines. Essentially, you should be following COVID regulations around anyone you don't live with.

Raimondo today said anyone planning a Halloween party to cancel it. "If you're making plans for Thanksgiving, think about not traveling," she said. The governor acknowledged it would be difficult, but key to stop virus transmission. Specific announcements on new trick-or-treating restrictions will be announced tomorrow.

"We've gotten good at isolating people when we test positive," said the governor. Contacts comply with state officials when quarantining after exposure to someone with COVID. The governor wants to ramp up asymptomatic testing, saying today it was key to the next phase of flattening any rise in cases.

In other announcements, the governor stated today Central Falls and Providence Public Schools would remain in their hybrid model for the rest of the semester. Metrics in the schools themselves have been good, but wider spread in their cities has the governor concerned. The Department of Commerce today announced additional relief to the state's small business relief program, the Restore RI initiative. While only 20% of the money for the program has been awarded since its start two months ago, the governor said they were doubling the amount businesses could be eligible for. Eligibility has opened up to sole proprietors, non profits and childcare businesses.

Governor Raimondo also announced she would be getting tested weekly on Dr. Alexander-Scott's recommendation. Within the next week state leaders are expected to roll out a new mandatory testing system for specific asymptomatic populations in order to obtain an accurate picture of community spread. One of the examples the governor gave when asked would be RIC/CCRI commuters getting tested weekly. The state can't force people to get tested, Raimondo acknowledged, but the state will offer it. The state doesn't intend to send cops to people's houses if they have large gatherings, people have gotten lazy not malicious. State regulators will be cracking down on bars and other places.